

Correspondence.

To the Editor of the "Eugenics Review."

EUGENICS Versus CIVILIZATION.

Sir,

I have read, with very great interest indeed, the article under the above heading in the Review for July, but there are one or two points made which seem to me open to criticism. For instance take the following:—"It is a well known statistical fact that every civilised society is at present cursed with a differential birth-rate of the wrong kind. That is to say, the birth-rate is everywhere much lower in the higher than in the lower strata of the social scale, and even in England, which is not by any means the worst off of civilised communities, it is only one-half of that necessary to maintain the numbers in the upper classes. As this difference is nothing like compensated for by the lower death-rate in the upper strata, the effect is that every civilised society is engaged in extirpating its upper classes and in recruiting itself from its lower."

This seems to assume that the social division of classes corresponds with the eugenic division. But surely this is not so. In the so-called "lower classes" in the social scale there are many men and women who, from the eugenic point of view, are infinitely more valuable than some of the members of the so-called "upper classes." In all the social grades, except, perhaps, the very lowest, there are many men and women who are eugenically desirable, as well as some who are the reverse. The writer of the article now being considered, admits that "through history aristocracies have decayed and died out." In England, perhaps, this has been less so than in other countries, one reason probably being that, for centuries past at least, the younger sons have had more or less to make their own careers just as the middle class do. The aristocracy of England never became a separate "caste" as it did in some other countries. Even the eldest sons who inherited the estates and titles (if there were titles in the family), as a general rule did some real work in improving agriculture and, if they had any capacity in that way, in doing political work. All this was good for them and for the nation also. In spite of this many old families have died out. Surely the obvious inference is that the average man needs some compelling influence of personal need to make him really work. If in addition to the tendency to slackness in work, a privileged position leads to extinction of the family, it is all to the good that the class should be recruited from the more vigorous members of the middle class. If they in turn succumb to the enervating effects of escape from the struggle for mere existence, it is all to the good that their places should be taken by men who have been successful in that struggle.

Some exception too must be taken to what is said about the Busoga tribe in the Uganda Protectorate. Surely it would be much more in the real interests of these people if the bulk of the men were sufficiently well off to rear healthy families than that the main recruitment of the population should be left to polygamous chiefs. For a chief to leave a thousand descendants when he dies, while the average peasant woman rarely rears more than one child, seems to me a dysgenic, not a eugenic, arrangement. However it may have worked among the Busogas, this excessive polygamy among the rulers has not worked well in India and other countries in which it has prevailed. The Busoga chiefs had probably to remain good fighting men personally if they were to retain their place, but in more advanced societies, with more complicated administrative arrangements, where personal fighting was no longer required from the King, royal polygamy most certainly did not result in producing a superior breed. Far from it. Over India and Burma at least, I am sure that the average peasant, wringing a scanty living from the soil, would in nine cases out of ten prove a better man in every way that matters than the pampered sons of the polygamous kings.

I quite agree with the conclusion arrived at by the writer of the article under discussion, namely that our first efforts in practical eugenics must be cautious and

tentative. But there are one or two directions in which some practical beginning at least might be made. For instance we know certainly that many unions, both in marriage and outside it, are hopelessly dysgenic. Yet we do nothing to prevent them. So far as valid marriages are concerned, it may be sufficient at present to try and educate public opinion in this matter. In time, perhaps, we might get a law passed to the effect that a doctor's certificate of normal bodily and mental health in both bride and bridegroom must be produced before any valid marriage can take place. The cases of dysgenic unions outside marriage are more difficult to deal with, though they are probably in many cases far worse than those in marriage. These, however, are part of the whole question of what should be done with the whole class of the shiftless and utterly hopeless class who sink inevitably to the lowest slums of the great cities and who are, apparently, quite incapable of making any fight for themselves in the struggle for existence which is the natural schooling of normal men and women. Surely the only practicable way of dealing with them is to segregate the sexes and to let the class die out. There need not be any undue hardship to them in this. Nature weeds out the upper classes who become less virile than those still in the struggle. She would do the same with those who sink to the lowest class if we left them alone, but we interfere to prevent that out of pure charity. I have nothing to say against that charity provided it is run on lines which will prevent this class from increasing and multiplying indefinitely. Nature's methods seem to us harsh and cruel, but we must work with her if we are to do any permanent good. We can mitigate the harshness very materially by preventing children being born into the world totally unfit to face the normal struggle for existence. Nature lets them be born, starve and die prematurely. We can do much to prevent that.

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